

RESULTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

The comprehensive statewide assessment information gathered to assess rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in Wisconsin includes: DVR order of selection wait list times during FFY '05 and '06, state plan public hearing comments, Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council (WRC) comments and recommendations in attachment 4.2(c), DVR Consumer and Staff Survey results, the FFY 2005-2007 State Independent Living Plan (SPIL) needs assessment and employment objectives, and input from meetings with leadership representatives from Community Rehabilitation Programs, The Wisconsin Independent Living Council, Centers for Independent Living, The Wisconsin Developmental Disability Council, and the State Medicaid Agency's Governor's Council, Medicaid Infrastructure Grant demonstration office, the Department of Public Instruction, and Disability Councils representing a variety of constituencies.

1. Description of the results of the comprehensive, statewide assessment with respect to:

a. Rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities

The DSU has implemented a Consumer Satisfaction Survey process that is now in its second full year of operation.

A random sample of our active consumers is drawn twice annually. A coded questionnaire is used in order to identify respondents with the Workforce Development Area where the consumer is served. The survey is a combination of multiple choice and narrative format.

Because DVR purchases more than \$38 million in services from community providers and vendors, DVR often receives survey feedback on the nature and quality of the provider's services.

To resolve issues raised by consumers:

- The Workforce Development Area (WDA) Director calls the consumer to gather any additional information, and to indicate our interest in resolving the issue(s).
- S/he then meets with any and all involved staff members and, as appropriate community rehabilitation program provider, to investigate and plan the best resolution to address the issue(s) for this consumer.
- As appropriate, the WDA manager will also provide staff training to the WDA staff as a whole on the subject(s). This training usually occurs at regularly scheduled staff meetings.

- In the rare instance where there is an emergency nature to the topic, the WDA manager would call an immediate special staff meeting to address the subject matter.
- Every 6 months all management staff receive a copy of the survey results as well as all written comments. In addition, a comments file is available in the DVR Central Office for "anytime" perusal.
- Central office staff (CO) use both the numeric tabulation of the survey responses and the written commentary to provide managers training as the responses warrant.
- DVR Central Training Staff also use the information to inform curriculum development for the Comprehensive Counselor Training Sessions (2 weeks in length) which are held twice annually.

CO also uses the information to keep the WRC apprised of our efforts to evaluate customer service, how we and our community rehabilitation program partners are doing, steps we have taken to address individual concerns, and how we constantly attend to the overall improvement of our product -- which itself is service.

DVR also meets with representatives from the community provider community and Centers for Independent Living to solicit their input related to DSU communication, consumer referrals, teaming efforts, and the providers' ability to offer quality services under the DVR fee-for-service schedule and technical specification standards.

b. Needs which focus particularly on the service needs of those with significant disabilities, including supported employment

Federal law requires DVR to prioritize services for individuals with the most significant disabilities who wish to obtain or maintain competitive employment. The two most frequently funded service options for this population include job development with job site accommodations and/or supported employment.

Due a continued high demand for DVR services, the DSU has been operating under an Order of Selection for several years. In FFY '05, the DSU made the decision to delay activation of all employment plans, even those for persons with the most significant disabilities, due to insufficient resources to support additional services. At one point there was more than a year wait for persons who had been determined to have a most significant disability from the time of eligibility determination to plan development. There was a 2-year wait for those with significant disabilities. The DSU and WRC recognized that due to the inordinate length of time from eligibility to service and the high attrition when individuals were invited from the wait list to plan development, the OOS wait list constituted an "unserved and underserved group of individuals".

In the last quarter of FFY '05, the DSU received a large increase in state match and was able to use the match to realign federal funds to the OOS wait list and significantly increase plan development in FFY '06.

In FFY '07, the DSU will place a priority on serving persons with the most significant and significant disabilities on its OOS wait list in a timely manner. The DSU will strive to maintain immediate activation of employment plans for persons determined to have the most significant disabilities, and to achieve a wait period of no longer than 3 months for persons determined to have significant disabilities.

Supported employment services required beyond the parameters of the DSU time-limited support are most often provided with public funds from Wisconsin counties. The counties also provide public funding for work opportunities in community rehabilitation programs (i.e., sheltered workshops or work centers).

The Rehabilitation Act does not consider a workshop or work center setting to be a competitive employment outcome for DVR consumers. Sometimes, individuals are paid for actual production, which may be at a sub-minimum wage rate. As counties experience budget cutbacks, for individuals who wish to work in the community, access to supported employment funding and opportunities have become a major issue.

Supported Employment in an integrated community setting is often an employment option for individuals with the most significant disabilities. Service providers in local communities have developed job coaching supports for individuals with developmental disabilities, mental illness, and brain injury to enable individuals to maintain jobs in their community. Under a traditional service delivery of on-going paid supports, these programs are very expensive and the growing challenge has been to maintain public funding for these services or identify alternative resources.

As with other DVR funded employment services, once employment is achieved, the individual "graduates" from the DVR program. Federal law does not allow DVR to provide indefinite services for an individual once they are employed. DVR funding pays for the Supported Employment assessment, job development, and training on the job site. Once an individual is employed and no longer receiving training on the job, long term supports (e.g. occasional job coaching) need to be funded by an alternative source. County human service dollars have been the most common source for this long term support funding. As counties face growing budget challenges, this source for funding has declined and is no longer available in some counties. The reduced funding also results in fewer service agencies offering this service.

DVR has attempted to address the reality of reduced funding for long-term employment supports by funding several Innovation and Expansion projects aimed at developing and improving access to natural supports in the work place and alternative sources of funding for long-term workplace supports. See Attachment 4.12 (d) for a description of the projects.

During FFY '05, the WRC hosted panels of experts to gain a fuller understanding of the challenges posed by reductions in long term support funding and sub-minimum wage employment. The Council is very concerned about the future of Supported Employment as an option for individuals with the most significant disabilities. The Council is also concerned about the individuals who receive the lowest wages under the sub-minimum wage contracts. In the FFY '06 state plan (see 4.2 (c), the WRC made several recommendations to DVR to address these concerns.

During FFY '06, in response to the WRC's recommendations, the DSA, DSU and WRC co-sponsored with the Medicaid State Agency a summit on the future of long term employment supports. Key stakeholder partners and organizations were invited to the summit. The DSU and the Medicaid State Agency remain active in a post-summit inter-organizational workgroup that is focused on effecting systems change across government agencies, funding sources, and employment support practices to positively impact the future delivery of long term employment supports. Due to the scope of the challenge, the workgroup effort and DSU participation will continue throughout FFY '07.

In FFY '06 the DSA through its Division of Equal Rights also formed a stakeholder advisory workgroup to focus on the issue of subminimum wage practices in Wisconsin. While the DSU is not involved in the workgroup, the WRC chair is a DSA appointee to the advisory workgroup. The advice of the workgroup is anticipated to shape the future of subminimum wage practice in Wisconsin. In FFY '07, the DSU will conduct outreach activities to the individuals who are working in non-competitive work environments and who may be interested in competitive employment and DVR services.

ii. Those with disabilities who are minorities

The DSU maintains a focus on multicultural service and training issues. The DSU has identified its vital documents and these are available in Spanish and Hmong, as well as alternate formats, including large print, audio tape and Braille. The DSU continues to monitor its publications and other information to ensure that the list of vital documents remains current and that information that is needed to access services is available in other languages and in alternate formats.

The DSU acknowledges the requirements of the General Education Provision (GEPA) Section 47 and the need to have equitable access and participation in the DSU program service delivery system for individuals with special needs. In addition, the DSA has a statewide work group with representation from the DSU to provide services to Limited English Speaking individuals who are often unserved or underserved due to language barriers.

Public Comment: Consumers still have trouble understanding the DVR process. People with cognitive disabilities have much difficulty with the process. DVR counselors need to do a better job to explain the process and to explain the fact that DVR is a process. Independent Living Centers are serving more people with limited or no English. We need DVR to do better outreach to non-English speaking people with disabilities. The trend of county services to go paperless and rely on computer driven decisions is posing problems for people with disabilities from other cultures or with limited English.

Response: The DSU has undertaken initiatives to serve the state's rapidly increasing Latino/Hispanic populations (see 4.12(a)). In Milwaukee, the DSU has counselors colocated at a job center run by United Migrant Opportunity Services, a Latino human service organization. Other offices have hired bilingual counselors. These efforts are aimed at increasing and improving outreach and service delivery in three of the largest Latino/Hispanic communities in Wisconsin. When the DSU does not have access to a staff member who is fluent in the native language of the consumer, the DSU also utilizes language translation services. The DSU agrees that language barriers pose a challenge to the delivery of DVR services and that staff must take the time and make the effort to surmount language barriers and achieve a full understanding of the DVR process. The DSU uses the Client Assistance Program DVR process chart to assist consumers in understanding the DVR processes and where their responsibilities lie. The DSU will work with CAP to get the process chart translated into Spanish in the next State Fiscal Year.

In FFY '07, the DSU will co-locate in a One-Stop Job Center which has one of Milwaukee's highest concentrations of African American residents as well as residents of other diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The DSU continues to work collaboratively with Wisconsin Native American tribes to expand outreach, increase VR services to Native Americans, target services to Native Americans not living on or near reservations, and to provide rehabilitation technology for this underserved group.

Program revenue is provided to the DSU from the Native American Gaming Initiative (NAGI) fund, for programs and services for Native Americans with disabilities at or near reservations. The DSU uses these funds to match federal funds, and allocates the funds to Section 121 funded tribal programs, for

the delivery of a variety of benefits to the Native American population in Wisconsin.

Census figures reveal that there are more Native American Indians living in the Metro Milwaukee area than on all the combined reservations in Wisconsin. Results indicate that the presence of Native American outreach workers has had a positive increase on referrals and IPE's are jointly developed with the input of the consumer, Native American workers and DSU staff.

The DSU has two Native American Outreach Workers who are co-located in Milwaukee offices. These outreach workers have been employees of the GLITC since CY 2000. The DSU provides administrative support and trains and mentors the workers to increase the number of referrals, facilitate Individual Plans for Employment (IPEs) with cultural sensitivity to Native American services and values and increase employment outcomes of Native American Indians.

iii. Those with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved

The Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council (WRC) has recommended that WDVR address concerns related to outreach and services to persons who are employed in work centers and especially those who are earning a sub-minimum wage.

WDVR agrees with the WRC that persons with disabilities earning a subminimum wage in a non-integrated work environment may be considered an underserved target group. DVR agrees that a statewide outreach effort is needed to provide information on DVR services to this group of individuals. In FFY '07, the DSU will conduct outreach activities to the individuals who are working in non-competitive work environments and who may be interested in competitive employment and DVR services.

iv. Those with disabilities who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system

DVR continues to collaborate with efforts to improve the accessibility of One Stops through facilitating program and physical accessibility implementation and training to One Stop staff. Needs analysis led to site reviews to provide recommendations to meet program and physical accessibility requirements in Job Centers statewide.

The DSU continues to support implementation of site review recommendations. The DSU also collaborates to assist DWD Disability Navigators with on going training of job center staff on disability sensitivity issues, TTY/Relay usage, pre-employment assessments and work-place technologies.

Input from the State Independent Living Council identified that consumers who need to coordinate the efforts of different government agencies face unique challenges. W-2 consumers with disabilities face those challenges. National studies indicate that over 40% of the remaining families on TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) have disability issues. DVR and W-2 (Wisconsin's TANF) have very different rules and expectations for participation. An individual facing parenting responsibilities, poverty, and disability issues needs to work with agencies that can coordinate their efforts.

The Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council has invited panels from local W-2 and DVR agencies to WRC meetings to provide information on what works and where the challenges remain. During FFY '06, WRC and DSU representatives served on the Department of Workforce Development work groups on W-2 and disability issues. Improved communication and service coordination among DVR counselors and case managers in W-2 community organizations is a result of the workgroup. The interagency coordination efforts and workgroup participation will continue in FFY '07.

b. Establishes, develops, and/or improves community rehabilitation programs (CRPs).

Because the DSU relies heavily on purchased services from community rehabilitation programs (CRPs), the DSU maintains a continued interest in improving the relationship between the DSU and CRP partners. In FFY '06, the DSU responded to recommendations made by the Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council for improving the communication and cooperation between CRPs and the DSU in serving a common VR customer. The WRC recommendations are items 5 and 16 in attachment 4.2(c) of the FFY '06 State Plan. The DSU developed a work plan which addressed each recommendation and reported activities and progress at quarterly WRC meetings.

In response to CRP concerns about outcome payments for payment services and their ability to maintain qualified job development and placement staff under an outcome payment system, in FFY '06, the DSU implemented in cooperation with local CRPs, several milestone payment pilot demonstrations for measurable job placement activities. In FFY '07, the results of the milestone payment pilots will be evaluated and utilized to make changes to the established fee structure should such changes be warranted.

Other Needs Assessment Activities

The DSU supported the efforts of the Independent Living Council of Wisconsin (ILC-W) to develop the FFY 2005-2007 State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). Through a series of public hearings and an electronic survey effort, the ILC-W conducted a statewide needs assessment prior to developing the SPIL. In the Employment section of the SPIL, the ILC-W developed 7 goals and a series of related activities aimed at improving employment outcomes for persons with significant disabilities. The ILC-W states in the SPIL that it will collaborate with the DSA and DSU and private employment programs to significantly improve the capacity of people with disabilities to locate, obtain and retain employment. The DSU Administrator is an ad hoc member of the ILC-W and participates actively in meetings and in ILC-W efforts to advance the goals and activities of the employment section of the SPIL. The ILC-W State Plan is on-line at: http://www.ilcw.org/pdf/SPIL_attach.pdf.

Public Comment: I would like to see DVR continue to find ways to work with Community Support Programs (CSPs) and the new Comprehensive Community Services programs to support work opportunities for people with mental illnesses. Prior projects between DVR and CSPs have allowed DVR to address their historical limitations in serving this population. By working with mental health programs, DVR gets the benefit of professionals who understand the needs of people with mental illnesses and can provide the variety of supports they need to succeed, not just work supports. The form of future collaborations can be based on the current and past collaborations or focus more on training and technical assistance

Response: DVR is committed to serving persons with chronic and persistent mental illness and will continue to find ways to work with Community Support Programs (CSPs) and the new Comprehensive Community Services programs to support work opportunities for this group of consumers. We highly value our collaborative working relationship with the community partners and programs that effectively serve our common customer and intend to continue to build on these relationships.